

The environment battle

tors, including a 1977 IJC report in which officials from both sides of the border unanimously confirmed the dangers of biota transfer, legal action by the National Audubon Society, and withdrawal of funding by the Carter White House and Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus. Recently, however, the project has returned to life. Funds for Garrison were appropriated by a rider on an unrelated bill in a late-night procedural maneuver by North Dakota Senator Milton Young in the dying days of the last session of Congress before the 1980 election. A court injunction against the project also has been lifted, clearing the way legally for further construction. Moreover, Garrison's proponents are once again mobilizing and taking aim at the third and last of the impediments — the IJC study.

In a March, 1982, CBC interview, North Dakota Republican Senator Mark Andrews asserted that Canada's fears about Garrison were "groundless" and its criticisms were "political" and based only on "rumor" and "innuendo." When asked about the Commission's scientific study, he simply dismissed it. "The political people put the final editorial comment in [that report]," he argued, "and we had an administration in Washington that was against western water projects." Andrews' unstated assumption was that the current U.S. administration took a different view; it was not, like Canadian governments, "influenced by a bunch of environmental radicals."

Andrews and others are currently calling for proceeding with the flooding of another section of the McCluskey Canal, the major channel for carrying Missouri water over the continental divide. (Approximately one-half of the 70-mile-long canal now is filled, although the Lonetree Reservoir into which it would empty remains incomplete and essentially dry.) Further bilateral consultations on this next stage were held in February, 1982. Although modifications have been designed into the project, Canadian officials remain dissatisfied.

Canada-U.S. relations

The three issues of Great Lakes water quality, acid rain and the Garrison Diversion project are the major ones on the bilateral environmental agenda. But they are not the only contentious ones. For example, an American company's 10-year-old plan to build a major oil refinery and supertanker port at Eastport, Maine, appears likely to re-emerge as a bilateral conflict. Canada's recent promulgation of regulations prohibiting large tankers in the narrow and treacherous Head Harbour Passage has evoked a strong State Department rejection of Canada's claim of jurisdiction. Ostensibly an environmental problem, this issue is in fact closely linked to Law of the Sea issues in which the two countries are almost diametrically opposed. Even when uncomplicated by multilateral overtones, current bilateral environmental differences seem to be leading almost inescapably to not merely short-term but long-term, possibly nasty, conflicts.

Given all the noise and smoke in Canada-U.S. relations during the past year, it might well be asked whether environmental problems are perhaps merely part of a broader political downturn. It can be argued they are not. The war of words over Canada's National Energy Policy (NEP), the Foreign Investment Review Agency (FIRA), and Canadian takeovers has been lessening in recent

months, partly because the spate of takeover bids has passed and partly because Ottawa has backed off in some respects. The history of the 1960s and 1970s suggests recurring cycles of relative conflict and cooperation in Canada-U.S. relations. The downturns rarely last for an extended period, and if that pattern is to be repeated then the current low-point has probably already past and some overall improvement might be expected. In contrast, the conflicts in the environmental area seem destined to worsen as the full effects of the Reagan policy shifts, budget cuts, and personnel reductions are felt.

Why should environmental issues be the exception in the bilateral relationship? One possible explanation centres on what may be distinctive in the Reagan ideology. The administration's commitment to the free market system and its tough-minded, America-first foreign economic policies are hardly novel. Canadian economic nationalism has always concerned Washington; virtually any U.S. administration would have attacked the NEP. The distinguishing element of the current presidency as far as relations with Canada are concerned is its commitment to trimming the U.S. federal government and de-regulating, especially in the environmental area. Richard Nixon, hardly a liberal standard bearer, is remembered for initiating an economic counter-attack on America's allies. But he also appointed the first Council on Environmental Quality, established the Environmental Protection Agency, allowed both to operate, and, despite misgivings, signed the 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Tradeoffs between economic and energy concerns, on the one hand, and ecological concerns on the other, albeit often imbalanced, were characteristic of previous administrations. Such tradeoffs, even a willingness to seek compromises, are little in evidence these days as America's new conservatism takes steadfast aim at America's old conservationism.

Another possible and related explanation is more conspiratorial. The evidence for it is entirely circumstantial. Yet, to an observer of today's Washington, it appears at least plausible. This hypothesis — and it is no more — suggests that a hard-nosed, very political deal was reached prior to the Reagan administration's appointment process. That understanding between what might be called "pragmatic" and "conservative" forces within the Reagan camp, was essentially that the former would be allowed to run U.S. foreign policy, or at least the State Department, while the latter would control, without interference, key domestic departments such as Interior and the EPA. The result was the "moderate" Alexander Haig at State and the non-moderate James Watt and his protégé, Anne Gorsuch, at Interior and EPA, respectively. Such a deal, if it was struck, would explain the singular lack of pragmatism evident on the part of the latter in an administration otherwise more pragmatic than expected. It would also explain why even White House aides are reported to have indicated an inability to temper what has been happening within Interior and EPA.

Whatever the explanation, the Reagan presidency seems certain to leave its mark on the joint Canadian-American political effort to protect the ravaged common environment. Always an uphill battle, the effort has become, for a while, Sisyphean. □